

Hello Members of the Labor and Commerce Committee,

My name is Charles Edge. I served at Ft. Wainwright from 2016-2019 for the last three years of my six years active duty as an Infantryman. I left Alaska when I honorably left Active Duty and went to Virginia to be closer to family and found that I had been forever changed by the people, environment, and the Alaska Attitude; that self-reliant, scrappy, resourceful, and politically respectful attitude that has created the best state in the Union.

Part of the reason I left Virginia, aside from the aforementioned reasons, is that the Virginia Governor and legislative bodies had been and still are, passing Draconian laws and measures to “ensure the safety of” and to “protect” people from things that they have no need of being protected from by a Government institution. The “threat” that is posed by e-cigarettes (hereafter referred to as “vapes”) has been proven to not be a threat to the populace, but to corporations and states with budgets that depend on the sale of and taxes from traditional combustible cigarettes. It is no secret that vaping has caused a dent in States budgets that took loans against tobacco taxes, and in so doing has caused losses for companies that sell cigarettes. The hit to their bottom line has been so substantial that the Altria Group, who owns Marlboro, bought Juul Labs Inc., the same device that has been at the forefront of a large portion of the anti-vaping propaganda. The Juul device is one of the most common devices that are found in schools in the hands of minors in America, and they are owned by a tobacco company. As a vape consumer, this is very worrisome to me when I see legislation that seeks to demonize a product that I can personally attest to being an effective smoking cessation product.

I smoked Newport brand cigarettes for six years before I switched to vaping and I can attest and will be willing to provide my medical records to prove, that vaping helped me become healthier than smoking cigarettes. In the words of the 44th President of The United States Barack Obama, “Now let me be clear,” I am NOT going to attempt to tell the Members of this Committee that vaping is 100% safe, because nothing is. It is a *healthier alternative* to smoking cigarettes. Prior to quitting cigarettes, I consistently suffered from bouts with bronchitis, high blood pressure, decreased dental hygiene and had a chronic hacking cough. Additionally, it absolutely destroyed my sense of taste and smell. Since I started vaping, my sense of smell and taste have returned, my blood pressure has gone down, and I have not had Bronchitis or any other upper respiratory infections. An added benefit for me was that my Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) scores went up considerably up after quitting smoking due to dropping a solid two minutes from my run time. Again, I will make my medical records available for examination should my claim be doubted.

To the point that it is an effective cessation product, I would reference the Public Health England article “Vaping better than nicotine replacement therapy for stopping smoking, evidence suggest” published 2/23/21 (Please see the attached PDF). One Dr. John Newton, Director of Health Improvement stated that, “Thousands more could have quit except for unfounded safety fears about e-cigarettes. The evidence has been clear for some time that, while not risk-free vaping is far less harmful than smoking.” The report also shows that, “vaping products were the most popular aid used by smokers trying to quit

in England in 2020.” It also states “Using a vaping product as part of a quit attempt in local stop smoking services had some of the highest quit success rates – between 59.7% and 74% in 2019 and 2020.” It only makes sense to me, especially since we live in a free society, that in the face of scientifically proven facts that have not been altered to fit an agenda, that the Government and its elected representatives would wish for their constituents to have an effective and safe alternative to smoking.

This leads me to my second point about this legislation; it stands to not only effectively stop Alaskans from making the choice, for themselves, how they wish to use nicotine, but it also takes that choice away from otherwise legal adults. The portion of SB-45 that would raise the legal age of tobacco from 19 to 21 would take away the ability of Soldiers, Airman and other Servicemen and Women who literally were adult enough to volunteer to fight and possibly lay down their life this nation, to not purchase nicotine products. I literally can not think of a way for the Alaska Legislative body to in good faith say that this is solely to be in compliance with Federal Law when Marijuana and its products are legal here, in defiance of Federal Law. This is absolutely incredible to me. Especially considering SB-15 is in effect, which literally allows parents to purchase nicotine products for their underage children. This institutional hypocrisy is blatant and a slap in the face to adults who hold jobs, can serve the Nation, pay taxes, and can vote.

My final point that I will make about this legislation is that it proposes a 75% wholesale tax on vapor products. Seventy. Five. Percent. This would absolutely decimate small vape shops across the state of Alaska. This would close the doors of businesses that provide revenue for the State and their Borough’s, it would force shop owners who could afford to stay in business to apply astronomical prices to these products and it stands a very real chance of pushing many hardworking Alaskans back to the very unsafe practices of smoking or dipping. I for one seem to recall once upon a time that a 1% tax on tea was viewed poorly by some people that used that as a justification to say that the government, they fell under was immoral, unjust and corrupt. To impose such a steep tax upon Alaskans is positively heinous.

Having said all of this, I understand that vaping, like alcohol use and cigarettes, by minors is not ok and poses potential risks for them as they grow up. That being said, that minors who are caught with vape paraphernalia be punished with community service and that the enforcement arm of the Alaskan Government conduct more frequent and thorough operations against irresponsible vape shops and gas stations to not let these devices fall into the hands of minors.

Part of the allure for Alaska is the self-reliant and independent streak that my fellow Alaskans have. This bill would seek to punish those who use these devices responsibly, it would tax shop owners in a very un-American way without addressing some of the more pressing issues that plague Alaskans. I would argue that this bill, while well intentioned, does more harm than good and it takes away the freedom of choice for adult Alaskans to do as they see fit with their bodies, it restricts Serving adults from using

nicotine as a coping mechanism for the stress of Military service and it does so by ignoring independently verified scientific facts.

Members of the Committee, I do thank you, very much for reading my testimony and do hope that you all take some of these points into consideration. Thank you for your time and your service to the people of this great state of Alaska.

Respectfully,

Charles Edge